

March 2, 2010

Media Contact: Rebecca Dreilinger (202) 225-8203

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**(Chicago, IL)** The birth certificates of more than 50,000 Illinois residents will soon be invalidated due to a new law passed by the government of Puerto Rico. Congressman Luis V. Gutierrez (IL-04) is reaching out to the Puerto Rican community in Chicago to make them aware of the change that, as of July 1, 2010, will require new birth certificates for anyone born on the island. The law may affect individuals who are seeking to fulfill such diverse purposes as applying for passports, satisfying school entrance requirements, filing license applications, or seeking insurance or government benefits.

The birth certificates of more than 50,000 Illinois residents will soon be invalidated due to a new law passed by the government of Puerto Rico. Congressman Luis V. Gutierrez (IL-04) is reaching out to the Puerto Rican community in Chicago to make them aware of the change that, as of July 1, 2010, will require new birth certificates for anyone born on the island. The law may affect individuals who are seeking to fulfill such diverse purposes as applying for passports, satisfying school entrance requirements, filing license applications, or seeking insurance or government benefits.

The law, enacted in December, is intended to combat identity theft by invalidating all previously issued Puerto Rican birth certificates. In the past, many common official and unofficial transactions in Puerto Rico unnecessarily required the submission, retention, and storage of original, official birth certificates. As a result, hundreds of thousands of such birth certificates were stored without adequate protection, making them easy targets for theft.

"Clearly, this will pose a major inconvenience for people who have played by the rules all their lives, and that's not fair," said Rep. Gutierrez. "But it's even more unfair that honest people have had their identities stolen. As much as 40 percent of passport fraud in the U.S. involves birth certificates from Puerto Rico. That's outrageous, and frankly, action to stop it is long overdue.

The problem has made Puerto Rico-born citizens vulnerable to identity theft, ruined credit, stolen Social Security benefits, and increased 'random' security checks at airports, among others things."

"However, while this change is a positive step towards preventing identity theft, I am still very concerned that more people are not being made aware of it," continued Rep. Gutierrez. "This affects more than four million people across the country, including 1.3 million born in Puerto Rico and living on the mainland."

According to the Puerto Rico Federal Affairs Administration, many birth certificates have been stolen from schools and other institutions, sold on the black market for prices up to \$10,000 each, and used to illegally obtain passports, licenses, and other government and private sector documentation and benefits. Many common Hispanic names of individuals born in Puerto Rico made the birth certificates highly desirable on the black market.

U.S. citizens born in Puerto Rico but residing elsewhere may obtain a copy of the new birth certificate by [filling out a Birth Certificate Application form](#) from the Puerto Rico Vital Statistics Record office on or after July 1, 2010. Until July 1, 2010, all birth certificates will remain valid.

Residents without Internet access to complete the form can call Congressman Gutierrez' office for assistance at (773) 342-0774.

The government of Puerto Rico recommends that not everyone go about the renewal process right away. Rather, they are encouraging only people who have a specific need for their birth certificate related to the usage of the document for official purposes (such as passport application, etc.) to request a new birth certificate immediately. Those who wish to obtain a new copy of their birth certificate for their records are encouraged to do so at a later date to prevent a rush of applications and to ensure that those individuals with a specific need are able to obtain them in a timely fashion.

###

